



Lake Erie / Lake St. Clair Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain the fishery resources of Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers through better communication and partnership.

Meeting Notes – Final Lake Erie/Lake St. Clair Citizen's Fishery Advisory Committee Zoom Meeting

October 28, 2020

Present: John Bacarella, Mary Bohling, Dan Boileau, Andrew Briggs, Katelyn Brolick, Robert Burns, John Buszkiewicz, Mark Davis, Randy Espinoza, Jim Felganauer, Melanie Foose, Jim Francis, Eric Grajewski, Cleyo Harris, Matt Hughes, Frank Lepera, Tim Muir, Bob Neely, CO Breanna Reed, Paul Sacks, Michelle Selzer, Jerry Sickon, Sara Thomas, Henry Walters, Todd Wills

EGLE INVASIVE SPECIES WEBINAR SERIES: https://www.michigan.gov/egle/0,9429,7-135-3308_3333-539592--,00.html

LAKE ERIE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/egle/wrd-glmu-lake-erie-adaptive-management_681941_7.pdf

Welcome and Introductions – Jim Felgenauer, Chair

Review Agenda and Action Items – Jim Francis, Fisheries

- Improved boating access to the upper Detroit River
 - Gray Haven site - on radar, progress being made, lack of funding still an issue
- Fish cleaning station for Lake St. Clair
 - Renovation of Clinton River Cut-Off site June 1, 2021 (tentative) construction begins
 - Subcommittee formed, progress being made, specific site, Clinton River Cut-Off getting renovations already, so makes sense to design it there
 - Access from freeway advantage
 - \$110,000 – 130,000 estimated cost to construct and install fish cleaning station
- Harley Ensign BAS upgrades
 - Money still in place – indefinite hold
 - High lake level challenges, the money has been set aside and is still there for the project
- Improved ice access at Selfridge
 - Chief Olson wants a proposal, hopefully plan in place for the winter
 - Solution to have anglers get access to ice. Bob submitted site down on Lake Erie design.
- Seek feedback from Parks regarding maintenance of Monroe access site - ongoing discussion

Jim Felgenauer : Budget issues? Is anything changing? Hiring freeze and spending restrictions? Projections for budget are not awful, just being careful because uncertainty of what the future holds. May affect the future, not sure as of now.

Lake St Clair Fisheries Research Station - Sampling Update – Todd Wills, Fisheries

- Most staff are still teleworking
 - Return to office January 2021 at the earliest
 - Return to Work was granted for surveys and limited lab work
- Could not complete – April-May LE/LSC creel, LSC trap net, LSC spring electrofishing, LSC spring trawl, SCR sturgeon setlines, Cooperative lake wide small fish survey, LSC fall trawl
- Surveys completed in 2020
 - Lake Erie Trawl Survey
 - Forage catch rates
 - 2020 average relative to trend
 - Good amount of white perch
 - Age-0 walleye catch rates
 - Very high in 2018 & 2019
 - 2020 is down a little but still in the top 3
 - Age-0 Yellow perch catch rates
 - 2020 higher than 2014-2017
 - Little lower than 2018 & 2019
 - Young-of-year smallmouth bass catch rates were much much higher than they have seen in the recent past - close to 50 fish per hectare
 - Lake St. Clair Sturgeon Trawls
 - Catch rates have dropped since 2008-2009, likely due to a stark increase in water clarity around that time
 - 2020 is a little below long-term average, but typical in the past 3 years
 - 93 lb. Sturgeon 33" girth - estimated at 45 years old, haven't seen it since 2006
 - SCDRS Sonar
 - Tried to get in sites at Grassy Island and Fort Wayne, only finished the sonar at Grassy Island Reef (5 full assessments done there to date)
 - Lake St. Clair Nearshore
 - 14 or 15 sites from North Channel to Fords Cover
 - finish in the next couple of weeks
 - First time catching a juvenile lake sturgeon. There was no pit tag. The fish was pit tagged and released.

Question: How do you think gaps in data are going to affect the future and what is happening going forward?

- Going to be gaps in the data but these are long-term data sets.
- Looking ahead pandemic is unpredictable but going to try our best to get out right away in the spring

Question: Planting sturgeon in Lake Erie?

- Planted in Maumee River before
- Going to take a long time to see a return because of the long life span
- Egg take southern Lake Huron, stocking project started in the Saginaw River as well

Review Terms of Reference – Jim Francis, Fisheries

- Michigan, Superior, Huron, and Erie each have citizens fisheries advisory committees
- Each basin had slightly different terms of reference, wanting to try and standardize
- Highlighted areas of differences
- Differences:
 - Chair- A request for nomination and vote for a chair will occur every three years or when the chair becomes vacant
 - Ours does not have the three years
 - Vice- Chair- The vice-chair is elected by a majority of the members and serves the role of the chair if the chair is absent or vacant. Request for nomination and vote for vice chair.
 - We have no vice chair
 - Members- Members are appointed by the Chair of the Advisory Committee and Basin Coordinator
 - Basin coordinator was not involved before, it was the Fish Chief
 - Meeting attendance
 - Members are expected to regularly attend meetings and not be abusive or disruptive
 - Did not have this paragraph previously
 - Member responsibility
 - If not coming to meetings can be removed
 - Three-minute period uninterrupted speaking moment for each member
 - Did not have this before
 - Decision making
 - Consulting decision that goes to chair, if there is a topic that does not come to consensus the vote will be shown in the minutes
 - Minutes- will be posted on website

Discussion:

- Jim Felgenauer: Not looking for a consensus today, just looking for comments. Will come back to committee with final documents for consideration. Will decide if we want, a common terms of reference or accept our own. Jim says you can boot him out at any time not just every 3 years. A vice chair is a good idea. Not necessary for the Fisheries Chief to be involved and it is a good change for the Basin Coordinator to be involved. If you are not attending the meetings and do not want to be a part of it just resign. If there are health issues or something, we want to work with you, just make sure an effort is being made.
- Tim Muir- add vice chair to who talks about adding and removing members
- Jim Felgenauer: terms of reference is an operating agreement. Contentious issue #5 think it is up to the committee to add or take away time to make sure that it is fully discussed. Jim does not think the committee member should be limited to 3 minutes. There needs to be enough time to resolve the issue.
- Maybe limit the number of times they can speak on one topic – Tim
- Mary Bohling- potentially add in at the discretion of the chair
- Bob Neely – an uninterrupted time period that is made by the chair
- Member attendance is subjective

Lake Erie Grass Carp Research and Control Efforts – John Buszkiewicz, Fisheries

- Presentation was recorded and sent to members ahead of time
- Bob Neely- You identified that you hope to capture 390 fertile fish each year – how did you arrive at that figure? Previous structured decision-making conversations, limited information. It is a starting point, but we continue to refine the estimate as we collect additional information. That number would knock down the colonization of grass carp.
- What do you think the population is right now? Cannot answer- Sandusky River has quite a few. Diploid can reproduce. Triploid cannot.
- Robert Burns- How can you tell the difference between diploid and triploid? Physically you cannot - have to take it to the lab.
- Is the population growing exponentially? The numbers being caught are going up, but that is because we are putting a lot more time into it. Effort is going up which is why catch rates are going up. Grass carp have very specific spawning requirements. Eggs have to be suspended for a certain amount of time. Focusing sampling efforts during high-flow events is more effective at catching grass carp
- John Bacarella- Is there more you can tell us about temperature where they like to spawn? Where do they winter? They are a warm water fish, they prefer warmer temperatures. Fish have swam up the corridor but that is not the norm. Spawning temperature, they are very opportunistic 60-70 degrees is preferred. They will utilize any rain events.
- Jim Felgenauer- Upper Detroit River circled. The extent of the current efforts up there and are there any efforts going on to detect grass carp in Lake St. Clair? Do not know much about Lake St. Clair.
- Tagged any fish to see what their pattern is? Have used acoustic transmitters that they put in the belly and have also been able to utilize real-time receivers
- Henry Walters – What about the new technology that was developed as part of the bighead and silver carp control? Some of the methods developed as part of the Asian carp challenge will be integrated into the new plan for Brandon Road lock and dam
- Based on your monitoring movements through GLATOS are these fish homebodies or migratory? Mixture of both, we see some fish that hangout in the same spots for months at a time. All the fish are different. Some go all the way up into Huron and disappeared.

DNR-Fisheries Update – Jim Francis, Fisheries

- Consent Decree
 - The 2000 Consent decree is an agreement that governs allocation, management, and regulations of State and Tribal fisheries in the 1836 Treaty waters of the Great lakes
 - Agreement was set to expire August 8, 2020
 - US District Court extended Decree to December 31, 2020- pandemic slowed it down
- Cormorants
 - Migratory bird permits advertised June 5 in Federal Register
 - Comments closed July 20
 - Extensive comments: Michigan DNR, Minnesota DNR, New York DEC, Ohio DNR, Pennsylvania FBC, Wisconsin DNR, Assn of Fish and Wildlife agencies
 - FWS is reviewing comments and looking at alternatives. Waiting for service to publish impact statement - should be out this fall
- Brandenburg Park
 - Project that has shut down boat launch for the year
 - Failing sea wall and they are going in to do renovations
 - Adding breakwaters, soften up shoreline

- Refuge fishing pier
 - Refuge gateway - opened Oct 1
 - Thurs.-Sunday, daylight hours
 - 700 ft. fishing pier
 - Reports of catching smallmouth bass, walleye, right on edge of Trenton channel
- Regulations
 - Walleye regulations
 - Our September 2018 CFAC meeting
 - Reviewed SCDRS walleye regulations
 - Our March 2019 CFAC meeting
 - Recommendations
 - Consistent walleye bag limit
 - Increased April 1, 2020 to 6 walleye on the Detroit
 - Consistent walleye size limit
 - Fish Div planned to forward a recommendation to the NRC in summer 2020, for implementation in April 2021
 - NRC wanted less recommendations during 2020 because of COVID
 - Minimum size limit increase on St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair (15 inches) (April 2022)
 - **Concept - consistency in walleye regulations (min size limit and bag limit) from southern Lake Huron (St Clair River) to Lake Erie**
 - **If regulations change on Lake Erie – that change would be carried out throughout the entire system because the Lake Erie population is the main driver of the fishery throughout the system**

Question:

- Have we considered increasing the walleye creel limit in local waters and what about the discussion of a party or boat fishing limit?
 - Party fishing – if multiple people are fishing on the same boat, they are each entitled to their individual possession limit. But once an angler reaches their personal limit – they can no longer harvest fish. A party fishing proposal would allow all anglers to keep harvesting fish until the boat limit (combination of individual limits) is met. The challenge comes when you are shore fishing. What constitutes a party? Ice fishing and pier fishing are also hard to define.
 - Increased creel limit for walleyes- walleye booming right now, unfortunately since we could not get creel data at the start of the year due to COVID, we are missing harvest and catch rates. That makes it challenging to calculate our total harvest and see how it compares to our Total Allowable Catch
- VHS virus and what you have seen?
 - When we encounter dead shad in the spring we continue to test for VHS. There seems to be a great deal of variability from year to year.

Roundtable Reports – All

- John Bacarella – we saw a large number of new anglers enter into the sport; lots of perch (big); walleye keep booming; pan fish responding well to high waters

- Dan Boileau – The Downriver Walleye Federation cancelled all in person meetings and tournaments; fishing has been good but did not get out nearly as much as in the past
- Bob Burns – Friends of the Detroit River working on habitat restoration projects, Belle Isle finishing up; lots of fish activity in the bass spawning areas near Celeron; upcoming webinar on high water levels
- Mark Davis – Detroit Metro-West Steelheaders pretty inactive lately
- Jim Felgenauer – larval sturgeon capture and Little Traverse Bay Band of Indians raised them; no sturgeon in classroom program; concerned about news article that indicated interest in creating a tribal fishery on Lake St. Clair in Canadian waters
- Eric Grajewski- no updates
- Tim Muir- Michigan United Conservation Club representative VP for 2 years then president; getting kids out to do ice fishing derby if it is safe - last Sunday in January
- Bob Neely- Lake Erie Sterling State Park the walk area around pond is seriously eroded because of high water levels. The parks and rec have posted signs, hopefully we do not lose it and can save it. Lots of boats even with high winds and waters- having good luck with perch
- Paul Sachs- completed state championships, had 100 people all together. With COVID response in place, no cases came out of there. Smaller tournaments as well.
- Gerard Sickon- As a group they are focused on salmon and steelhead stocking as well as tribal negotiations. They are able to respond to negotiations. Focused on commercial fishing statutes, house bills were passed months ago and they are trying to update all commercial fishing statutes and try to modernize them. Have not moved to the floor yet. Very important for sport angler going forward.
- Henry Walters- Real good fishing and business year, Atlantic salmon fishery did not show up in the spring, which was interesting. Attributed it to the mild winter last year
- Sara Thomas- Stocking was impacted because of COVID - the Huron River and Clinton were stocked with steelhead, all of brown trout put on hold. Oden was able to hold the fish for them through summer and they got brown trout stocked last week in Mill Creek, Paint Creek, and St. Joe of Maumee River. DNR is not allowed to go to any public meetings but can go to virtual meetings if anyone wants them to talk, not a lot of data from this year to discuss
- Melanie Foose- Sediment remediation on the Detroit River downstream of MacArthur bridge is finishing up
- Michelle Selzer- Offer opportunity to weigh in on Lake Erie adaptive management plan that they are working on. I hope that in near future do a presentation so the group can give a public comment. Make sure she gets on agenda in spring

Summary of Meeting and Future Topics - All

- Conference call upcoming with parks regarding fish cleaning station – provide update
- Continue to monitor potential commercial fishing situations and the tribes
- Yellow Perch Diet Study in Lake St. Clair, western Lake Erie, and Saginaw Bay. Central Michigan University graduate student has processed stomachs and is in process of analyzing data, so should have enough for a presentation/update for the next meeting.

Next meeting – Date to be determined, but it will be scheduled before the spring walleye run – typically the end of March